

# Language and its Applications

## LT5903



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Lecture 7: Pragmatics

# Lecture plan

- Semantics review
- Grice's Maxims
- Implicature
- Short break (15 mins)
- Group discussion on HW7

# Semantics review

The study of linguistic meaning and how expressions convey meaning.

**sense v.s. reference:** mental representation v.s specific entity

**meaning relationships:**

**hyponymy:** hyponym, hypernym, sister terms

**synonymy**

**antonymy:** complementary pairs, gradable pairs, reverses, converses

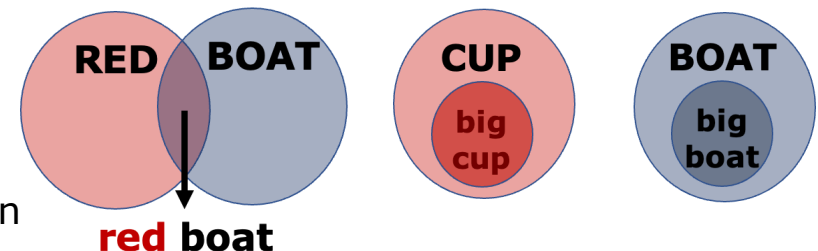
**sentence meaning**

- **propositions:** the claim expressed by a sentence
- **truth value:** all propositions have a truth value
- **truth condition:** the conditions that would have to hold in a world in order for a specific proposition to be true

**entailment, mutual entailment, incompatible**

**meaning composition**

- **verb-noun composition**
- **adjective-noun composition:**  
pure intersection, relative intersection, non-intersection, anti-intersection



# What is pragmatics?

The study of **the way people use language** in actual conversation.

Pragmaticists are interested in:

- How context changes what speakers intend
- How context changes what hearers hear
- How language shapes context

# Sentence v.s utterance

**sentences:** a phrasal expression

- written in italics:

*The horse raced past the barn fell.*

**utterances:** real actual events, what comes out of a person's mouth when he or she speaks

- written in double quotations:

"The horse raced past the barn fell."

Utterances have properties that sentences do not have:

- time, place, volume, speaker, hearer/audience

# Type of contexts

**Linguistic context:** what preceded a particular utterance in a discourse / what other people have said earlier:

“Do you like green beans?”

“Is there a computer?”

“Will you marry me?”

“Yes”

**Situational context:** information about the world in which the discourse is uttered

“Rachel is very **tall**.”

toddler

10-year-old

professional basketball player

**Social context:** information about the relationships between the people speaking and hearing the utterances.

“Can you take out the trash?”

“You must do so right now.”

“You don’t have to, but I’d appreciate it if you did.”

# Felicity: Situational appropriateness

**felicitous utterances:** situationally appropriate utterances

not situationally appropriate utterances are marked with a hashtag #

- A: What is your major?
  - B: I study political science.
- 
- A: What is your major?
  - B: #I have a major.
- 
- A: What is your major?
  - B: #I'm from Georgia.

# Rules of conversation

The basic assumption underlying conversation is the understanding that what one says is intended to **contribute to the purposes of the conversation** and people intend to be **cooperative conversational partners**.

*A: How are you today?*

*B: Oh Harrisburg is the capital of Pennsylvania.*

*A: Really, I thought the weather would be warmer.*

*B: Well, in my opinion, the soup could use a little more salt.*



# Grice's Maxims

Guiding the conversational interactions of both speakers and listeners.

The speaker follows them in being cooperative, and the hearer assumes that the speaker is following them

- **The Maxim of Quality**
- **The Maxim of Relevance**
- **The Maxim of Quantity**
- **The Maxim of Manner**

# The Maxim of Quality

Expectations about **information**

- **Do not say what you believe to be false**
- **Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence**

*"There is not a sun in the sky"*

*"Humans have never been to the moon"*

*"The venom of the purple-toothed spider isn't strong enough to kill people."*

# The Maxim of Relevance

Expectations about **information**

- **Be relevant**

A: What did we have to do for homework?

B: The teacher's shirt was really wrinkly today.

A: Is Jamie dating anyone these days?

B: Well, she goes to Cleveland every weekend.

A: We should think of something fun to do this weekend!

B: Can we talk about something that happen to me in class instead?

# The Maxim of Quantity

Expectations about **information**

- **Make your contribution as informative as required**
- **Do not make your contribution more informative than is required**

A: What are your plans after graduation?

B: Eating.

A: How are you?

B: I am good. I went to Atlanta last night to pick up my friend and then we had dinner and it took forever to get our food...

# The Maxim of Manner

Expectations about **speakers**

- **Avoid obscurity of expression**
- **Avoid ambiguity**
- **Be brief**
- **Be orderly**

A (with no linguistic background): What did you just say?  
You: A string of phonemes, when combined together are morphemes that create words which contain specific semantic meaning and are ordered syntactically following the rules of my language.

# Practice

Construct your own examples of a conversation in which one of the maxims is violated.

- The Maxim of Quality
- The Maxim of Relevance
- The Maxim of Quantity
- The Maxim of Manner

# Flouting Maxims

When a speaker on the surface seems to violate a maxim, but the audience is able to understand what the speaker means

A: Do you like Sally?

B: I don't hate her.

The Maxim of Quality

A: Sally is such an awful person!

[Sally approaches behind A]

B: Yes! It is supposed to be such a hard test tomorrow!

The Maxim of Relevance

A: Would you recommend Sally for the job?

B: Yes, she always coordinates her shoes with her outfit.

The Maxim of Quantity

A: Did you want pizza or Chinese for dinner?

B: Yes.

The Maxim of Manner

# Implicature

**implicature:** Conclusion that is drawn about what people mean based on what we know about how conversation works

Hearers use Grice's Maxims to help them determine the implicatures of speaker's utterances

A: Are you cold?

B: Yes {or no}

B: It feels fine to me.

B: There is a blanket on the couch.

B: It is only 74 degrees in here.

B: [Adjust the thermostat]



# To do

**Assign yourself to the correct group under A7!**

Do HW7

Read:

This lecture: **File** Ch7

Next lecture: **File** Ch8